

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
WESTERN DISTRICT OF MICHIGAN
SOUTHERN DIVISION

KENNETH BROWN,

Plaintiff,

Case No. 1:22-cv-417

v.

Honorable Jane M. Beckering

STATE OF MICHIGAN et al.,

Defendants.

OPINION

This is a civil rights action brought by a state prisoner under 42 U.S.C. § 1983. Under the Prison Litigation Reform Act, Pub. L. No. 104-134, 110 Stat. 1321 (1996), the Court is required to dismiss any prisoner action brought under federal law if the complaint is frivolous, malicious, fails to state a claim upon which relief can be granted, or seeks monetary relief from a defendant immune from such relief. 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e)(2), 1915A; 42 U.S.C. § 1997e(c). The Court must read Plaintiff's *pro se* complaint indulgently, *see Haines v. Kerner*, 404 U.S. 519, 520 (1972), and accept Plaintiff's allegations as true, unless they are clearly irrational or wholly incredible. *Denton v. Hernandez*, 504 U.S. 25, 33 (1992). Applying these standards, the Court will dismiss Plaintiff's complaint as frivolous and for failure to state a claim.

Discussion

I. Factual allegations

Plaintiff is presently incarcerated with the Michigan Department of Corrections at the Macomb Correctional Facility in New Haven, Macomb County, Michigan. Plaintiff sues the State of Michigan and Governor Gretchen Whitmer.¹ (Compl., ECF No. 1, PageID.1.)

Although Plaintiff's writing in his complaint is legible, the words do not form coherent sentences or convey clear thoughts. Plaintiff states, in sum: "1232 Cholfont Peggy won[']t stop spelling pain or B sister won[']t stop trying to make a homosexual out of me. 17th murytal [sic] viclim [sic] Kenneth Brown inmate convict, Macomb Michigan[.] Litigation her 21 million cruel oppressor abussing [sic] me with her athonity [sic]." (*Id.*, PageID.2–3.) As relief, Plaintiff seeks monetary damages.

II. Frivolity

An action may be dismissed as frivolous if "it lacks an arguable basis either in law or in fact." *Neitzke v. Williams*, 490 U.S. 319, 325 (1989); *Brown v. Bargery*, 207 F.3d 863, 866 (2000); *Lawler v. Marshall*, 898 F.2d 1196, 1198 (6th Cir. 1990). Claims that lack an arguable or rational basis in law include claims for which the defendants are clearly entitled to immunity and "claims of infringement of a legal interest which clearly does not exist;" claims that lack an arguable or rational basis in fact describe "fantastic or delusional scenarios." *Neitzke*, 490 U.S. at 327–28; *Lawler*, 898 F.2d at 1199. An *in forma pauperis* complaint may not be dismissed, however, merely because the court believes that the plaintiff's allegations are unlikely. *Neitzke*, 490 U.S. at 328.

¹ In addition to the Defendants listed herein, George W. Romney was inadvertently listed on the docket as a Defendant in this action. In the complaint, Plaintiff lists the "George W. Romney Building" when providing Defendant Whitmer's address, rather than listing George W. Romney as a Defendant in this action. (ECF No. 1, PageID.1.) As such, the Clerk shall terminate George W. Romney as a Defendant in this action.

In this case, the Court is unable to discern the allegations and claims contained in Plaintiff's complaint. Although the complaint itself is generally legible, the words often do not form coherent sentences, nor do they convey clear thoughts. Because the Court is unable to decipher Plaintiff's incoherent and rambling statements in the complaint, his complaint necessarily lacks an arguable basis either in law or fact. *See id.* at 325; *see also Parker v. Parker Int'l/Parker Tobacco Co.*, No. 89-6078, 1990 WL 63523, at *1 (6th Cir. May 11, 1990). Even giving the most liberal construction to Plaintiff's complaint, *see Haines*, 404 U.S. at 520, the Court is unable to find that a cause of action has been alleged, much less a cause of action against either Defendant. Therefore, the Court concludes that dismissal is warranted pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e)(2)(B)(i) and 1915A(b)(1). Moreover, for the reasons set forth below, the Court also concludes that Plaintiff fails to state any plausible claim for relief.

III. Failure to state a claim

A complaint may be dismissed for failure to state a claim if it fails "to give the defendant fair notice of what the . . . claim is and the grounds upon which it rests." *Bell Atl. Corp. v. Twombly*, 550 U.S. 544, 555 (2007) (quoting *Conley v. Gibson*, 355 U.S. 41, 47 (1957)). While a complaint need not contain detailed factual allegations, a plaintiff's allegations must include more than labels and conclusions. *Id.*; *Ashcroft v. Iqbal*, 556 U.S. 662, 678 (2009) ("Threadbare recitals of the elements of a cause of action, supported by mere conclusory statements, do not suffice."). The court must determine whether the complaint contains "enough facts to state a claim to relief that is plausible on its face." *Twombly*, 550 U.S. at 570. "A claim has facial plausibility when the plaintiff pleads factual content that allows the court to draw the reasonable inference that the defendant is liable for the misconduct alleged." *Iqbal*, 556 U.S. at 679. Although the plausibility standard is not equivalent to a "'probability requirement,' . . . it asks for more than a sheer possibility that a defendant has acted unlawfully." *Id.* at 678 (quoting *Twombly*, 550 U.S. at 556).

“[W]here the well-pleaded facts do not permit the court to infer more than the mere possibility of misconduct, the complaint has alleged—but it has not ‘show[n]’—that the pleader is entitled to relief.” *Id.* at 679 (quoting Fed. R. Civ. P. 8(a)(2)); *see also Hill v. Lappin*, 630 F.3d 468, 470–71 (6th Cir. 2010) (holding that the *Twombly/Iqbal* plausibility standard applies to dismissals of prisoner cases on initial review under 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915A(b)(1) and 1915(e)(2)(B)(ii)).

To state a claim under 42 U.S.C. § 1983, a plaintiff must allege the violation of a right secured by the federal Constitution or laws and must show that the deprivation was committed by a person acting under color of state law. *West v. Atkins*, 487 U.S. 42, 48 (1988); *Street v. Corr. Corp. of Am.*, 102 F.3d 810, 814 (6th Cir. 1996). Because § 1983 is a method for vindicating federal rights, not a source of substantive rights itself, the first step in an action under § 1983 is to identify the specific constitutional right allegedly infringed. *Albright v. Oliver*, 510 U.S. 266, 271 (1994).

A. Defendant State of Michigan

Plaintiff may not maintain a § 1983 action against the State of Michigan. Regardless of the form of relief requested, the states and their departments are immune under the Eleventh Amendment from suit in the federal courts, unless the state has waived immunity or Congress has expressly abrogated Eleventh Amendment immunity by statute. *See Pennhurst State Sch. & Hosp. v. Halderman*, 465 U.S. 89, 98–101 (1984); *Alabama v. Pugh*, 438 U.S. 781, 782 (1978); *O’Hara v. Wigginton*, 24 F.3d 823, 826 (6th Cir. 1994). Congress has not expressly abrogated Eleventh Amendment immunity by statute, *Quern v. Jordan*, 440 U.S. 332, 341 (1979), and the State of Michigan has not consented to civil rights suits in federal court. *Abick v. Michigan*, 803 F.2d 874, 877 (6th Cir. 1986). Therefore, the Court will dismiss the State of Michigan as a Defendant in this action.

B. Defendant Whitmer

Plaintiff also names Governor Whitmer as a Defendant in this action; however, Plaintiff fails to name Defendant Whitmer in the body of his complaint. It is a basic pleading essential that a plaintiff attribute factual allegations to particular defendants. *See Twombly*, 550 U.S. at 555–61 (holding that, in order to state a claim, a plaintiff must make sufficient allegations to give a defendant fair notice of the claim). Where a person is named as a defendant without an allegation of specific conduct, the complaint is subject to dismissal, even under the liberal construction afforded to *pro se* complaints. *See Gilmore v. Corr. Corp. of Am.*, 92 F. App'x 188, 190 (6th Cir. 2004) (dismissing complaint where plaintiff failed to allege how any named defendant was involved in the violation of his rights); *Frazier v. Michigan*, 41 F. App'x 762, 764 (6th Cir. 2002) (dismissing plaintiff's claims where the complaint did not allege with any degree of specificity which of the named defendants were personally involved in or responsible for each alleged violation of rights). Here, Plaintiff's claims fall far short of the minimal pleading standards under Rule 8 of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure and are subject to dismissal.² Fed. R. Civ. P. 8(a)(2) (requiring “a short and plain statement of the claim showing that the pleader is entitled to relief”). Furthermore, to the extent that Plaintiff intended to hold Defendant Whitmer liable for the actions of her subordinates, government officials, such as Defendant Whitmer, may not be held liable for the unconstitutional conduct of their subordinates under a theory of respondeat superior or vicarious liability. *Iqbal*, 556 U.S. at 676; *Monell v. New York City Dep't of Soc. Servs.*, 436 U.S. 658, 691(1978); *Everson v. Leis*, 556 F.3d 484, 495 (6th Cir. 2009). A claimed constitutional

² Plaintiff also fails to name Defendant State of Michigan in the body of his complaint. Therefore, for the same reasons set forth herein, Plaintiff's claims against Defendant State of Michigan are also subject to dismissal due to Plaintiff's failure to name this Defendant in the body of his complaint.

violation must be based upon active unconstitutional behavior. *Grinter v. Knight*, 532 F.3d 567, 575–76 (6th Cir. 2008); *Greene v. Barber*, 310 F.3d 889, 899 (6th Cir. 2002). The acts of one's subordinates are not enough, nor can supervisory liability be based upon the mere failure to act. *Grinter*, 532 F.3d at 576; *Greene*, 310 F.3d at 899; *Summers v. Leis*, 368 F.3d 881, 888 (6th Cir. 2004). “[A] plaintiff must plead that each Government-official defendant, through the official’s own individual actions, has violated the Constitution.” *Iqbal*, 556 U.S. at 676. Plaintiff has failed to allege that Defendant Whitmer engaged in any active unconstitutional behavior. Accordingly, for these reasons, Plaintiff fails to state a claim against Defendant Whitmer.

Conclusion

Having conducted the review required by the Prison Litigation Reform Act, the Court determines that Plaintiff's complaint will be dismissed as frivolous and for failure to state a claim under 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e)(2) and 1915A(b), and 42 U.S.C. § 1997e(c). The Court must next decide whether an appeal of this action would be in good faith within the meaning of 28 U.S.C. § 1915(a)(3). *See McGore v. Wrigglesworth*, 114 F.3d 601, 611 (6th Cir. 1997). For the same reasons the Court concludes that Plaintiff's claims are properly dismissed, the Court also concludes that any issue Plaintiff might raise on appeal would be frivolous. *Coppedge v. United States*, 369 U.S. 438, 445 (1962). Accordingly, the Court certifies that an appeal would not be taken in good faith.

This is a dismissal as described by 28 U.S.C. § 1915(g).

A judgment consistent with this opinion will be entered.

Dated: June 15, 2022

/s/ Jane M. Beckering
Jane M. Beckering
United States District Judge